Observing influences on Korean pottery: Historically, culturally, environmentally, and personally

Jack E. Corle
OBSERVING INFLUENCES ON KOREAN POTTERY: HISTORICALLY, CULTURALLY, ENVIRONMENTALLY, AND PERSONALLY

by

Jack E. Corle Jr.

May 11, 1983
APPROVALS

Advisor: Robert D. A.  
Date: 5/20/83

Associate Advisor:  [Illegible]  
Date: 5/20/83

Associate Advisor: Ed Miller  
Date: June 6, 1983

Graduate Academic Council Representative: Fred Meyer  
Date: 6/9/83

Dean, College of Fine & Applied Arts: Robert H. Johnston Ph.D  
Date: 6/13/83

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Date: May 16, 1983
Table of Contents

Introduction ................................................................. 1

Part I
   Natural Environment ................................................ 5
   Chinese Influences .................................................... 6
   Korean Culture ......................................................... 9

Part II
   Introduction to Part II ............................................. 18
   Environment ........................................................... 19
   Culture ................................................................. 20
   My Work as an Individual Potter ................................ 24
      Series ............................................................... 25
      Preparation ....................................................... 25
      Form and Forming .............................................. 26
      Surface and Surface to Form Relationships ............... 28
      Woodfiring ....................................................... 31
      Woodfiring Jan. 15, 1982 ....................................... 31
      Summary ........................................................... 34

Conclusion ........................................................................ 35

Bibliography ...................................................................... 38

Appendix Plates ............................................................. 40
Introduction
I plan to focus on large stoneware containers. In my thesis I want to express visible, physical marks of the human hand and emotion. A physical mark is one that relates to the process; the physical act of making. I also want to achieve a correlation between surface and form. I plan to research Koryo dynasty mae-pyong vases to gain an understanding of what marks may tell of the people and the circumstances which produced them. I wish to analyze my work in a similar manner.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first deals with Korean Koryo pottery and the second with the studio work that I have completed as a fulfillment of my thesis project. I have chosen to research Koryo pottery in order to better understand its forms and the feelings that I am attracted to in their work. I set out not to copy but rather to compare their work to mine. Perhaps by looking back one may find himself in his own society. By this process I feel I can begin to look at things from a different viewpoint and examine anew the ideas of my personal aesthetic.

The first part of the thesis will include a discussion of the natural environment of Korea, the Chinese influence on Koryo ware, a discussion on Koryo ware, a description of Koryo pieces, a discussion of Korean culture, and a report on a modern day replica of a Koryo pottery and kiln. The latter report will describe the work done by potters using ancient methods to reproduce Koryo pots.

The second section will contrast my environment, my pottery, and my experiences at Rochester Institute of Technology with those of the ancient Korean potters. It will include discussion on this modern day environment and culture and will include information on my approach to
making pottery. A reflection on a recent firing of a wood kiln is included to show the effect of this experience on me as a potter.

This contrast of the two eras shows results of constraint on potters to make state approved pottery. They were influenced by others without actually copying others work. At the same time it shows results of a modern pottery who operated without those constraints, who was influenced by, but did not copy the work of those potters of old and who has found modern day applications of their work to be satisfying.
Part I
Natural Environment

The location of Korea, sitting as it does between Japan on the east and China on the west has made it subject to centuries of political and military interference from neighbors. With the internal struggle among the Korean people as they united and the interference of others, it is surprising that any works of art have survived for our examination.

Vases did survive and have been studied by art historians. In an article Some Characteristics of Korean Art, Choi Sunu writes of the "accord with nature" that is present in the art of this region.

I would like to point out that the first and foremost characteristic of Korean art is that it is in accord with nature. It is a beauty created not against the reasonableness of things and the movements of nature, but instead based on an attitude that respects nature. There have been few instances of unnaturalness in the conception and execution of a Korean art work. The material was respected and the finished work was always in harmony with where it was meant to be placed. This quality of Korean art derives from the Koreans' submission to nature and reason, and the peace of mind that comes from such an attitude. There were exceptions, such as some Buddhist temples or a royal palace and art objects used there. However, in comparison with Chinese art Korean art is characterized more by its quality of being in accord with nature, a beauty of discretion.¹

In a book edited by Kim and Gompertz,² several other vases are described. One was decorated with lotus blossoms and had leafy


arabesque incised over the whole body with an exceptionally thick line. The rich dark green vase was decorated with a key-fret pattern on the base. The height was about 44 centimeters. The base diameter was about 16 centimeters.

Another inlaid Celadon of the Mae-Pyong style was decorated with flying cranes and clouds. The eyes, legs and beaks of the cranes were black. The heads, necks, body and wings were white. Key-fret patterns in black were placed around the mouth and the foot. A crazed bluish green glaze was used.

Other designs of nature that were commonly used were lotus buds and blossoms, reeds, mandarin ducks, chrysanthemums, peony sprays, fungus patterns, and willow trees. At times human figures were used.

The environment also produced the materials used in the creation of the pots. Stoneware and porcelain clay was mined locally. Celadon glazes were produced from the feldspar rocks of the region. Kilns were fired with wood.

Chinese Influence

The Korean work does show a Chinese influence. At the beginning of the Koryo dynasty, distinct Chinese influences were apparent, although the artists never made direct copies of Chinese work. Salmon reports that early Korean celadons emulated Chinese Yuch porcelains of the 10th century A.D. and that by 978 A.D. the Korean pottery was

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3 Patricia Salmon, "5,000 Years of Korean Art," Arts of Asia, 10 No. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1980), p. 94.
able to create his own porcelains. Impressed by the Chinese ceramics from the Ju kilns during the eleventh century, potters tried to attain a porcelain that would look and feel like jade.

Gompertz\(^4\) refutes the claim that Korean pottery is actually copied from Chinese by recognizing the Chinese influence and by saying that, "Koryo wares soon became essentially Korean in character and free from Chinese external influence."\(^5\)

Gompertz agrees with others who feel that Chinese porcelains appeal to the eye while Korean wares appeal to the heart.\(^6\)

It must be recognized that the Korean culture is similar to the Chinese culture. Honey states:

The Corean peninsula projects from the extreme north of China towards the islands of Japan, and for most of its history has remained under Chinese suzerainty, though ruled as a separate kingdom. It has the same written language as China and the outward forms of its art are similar. But though the successive styles in Corean pottery may be said to run parallel with those of China, of no time can it be said that there was direct copying of Chinese models. The Corean potter was not only master of some techniques hardly practised at all in China, such as inlaid decoration, but his work remained thoroughly original in design and bold in its handling of the processes it shared with the Chinese.\(^7\)


\(^5\)Ibid.

\(^6\)Ibid.

Medley recognizes the Chinese influence but shows a need potters have for originality. In speaking of that period of history she says:

No potter, however, is content with what he has adopted from others, and as soon as he can he will evolve something new. The Koryo potters were no exception, and they chose a course which took their art right away from all previously accepted canons of ceramic decoration, when in the middle of the 12th century they suddenly began to inlay celadons with white and black firing clays. The whole approach to the surface of the bowls, vases and ewers underwent a revolution, the decoration attaining on the one hand an unprecedented freedom, and on the other a remarkable precision and regularity, both admirably balanced in their contexts and aesthetically satisfying.

In addition to the inlays mentioned above the Koreans also differed from the Chinese in the treatment of form. Medley observes that the mouths of the Korean vases were unique.

The dished mouth seems to have proved popular with the Koryo potters. Whether it was something to do with the external contour, with its angularity forming a satisfying contrast to the swelling curves of the vases, or simply that it was easy to make is impossible to know. It is, however, very noticeable that almost all the mae-pyong of the Koryo period are made with this type of mouth, while the Chinese examples in all wares, other than Yeh and Teng-feng, the latter also influential in Liao, have either a flattened mouth rim or a truncated conical mouth.

While the glaze used was not unlike that used in China, it would be expected that the glazes would be similar since the geological

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9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 83.

11 Medley, p. 83.
composition of the regions were similar. By the end of the eleventh century the Koreans had mastered the celadon type glaze and the high fire reduction technique. They were especially noted for the "kingfisher glaze."

Historians have noted that the influence of China on Korean pottery seems to have been directly related to the power that China had at any given time. At times that China held great power and had more contacts with Korea, the influence was greater. When China was occupied with others, the Koreans became more innovative.

In discussing the influence China had on Korean art, it should also be noted that Korea has been described as a bridge to transmit Chinese culture to Japan.

Korean Culture

The development of Korean pottery was closely associated with the Korean societal structure. It was highly centralized with no feudal institutions. It did not have merchant societies or governmental steps leading from village to throne. While there was a strict formality at the throne it did not influence the society as a whole. The development of art was, however, under the initiative of the top government with no organization to spread perfectionism outside of that agency. Special government initiative at "official" government kilns produced the outstanding technical and design features of the eleventh and twelfth century.

This government initiative was associated with the needs of an assertive government to strengthen its legitimacy and its prestige. The
art was used to embellish the new Koryo capital at Kaesong and to reflect the spiritual and temporal grace of Buddhist temples. While a Chinese influence was apparent, it was no more apparent that the influence Rome or Versailles had on the building of Paris. Commerce was carried on with neighboring states and brought back plans to elevate Koryo culture. Official kilns were established and there is evidence that Yueh potters taught at these kilns.

The pottery produced did not at this early date reflect much personal taste. It was rather a result of a conscious design by the state to elevate its cultural legitimacy in international trade and affairs. The early designs, therefore, show evidence of having been borrowed. The influences of the culture on the pottery produced may be examined by work produced throughout the Koryo period which was from 918 A.D. to 1392 A.D.

Kim and Gompertz\(^\text{12}\) describe the era in four periods.

The transitional period occurred during the tenth century, in which Silla pottery continued to be dominant, but the prototype of celadon ware appeared.

The second period was one of strong Chinese influence in celadon ware, in technique and in form.

The third period occurred in the twelfth century when Koryo ceramic art became independent of Chinese influence. Luxury loving kings allowed new taste and more freedom in design. A new Koryo celadon ware with its own technique and style developed, and featured

\(^{12}\)Kim and Gompertz, pp. 13-4.
a distinct colored glaze that was to remain the most significant Koryo contribution to pottery. The color known as "Koryo pi-saek", or King-fisher color was a fine bluish-green glaze.

A period of decline followed in the thirteenth century. Novel designs and new methods of decoration were introduced from China. This coincided with a decline in the national structure and led to an undermining of the fine Koryo tradition. By the fourteenth century the Koryo period had ended.

While considering the contribution of the Koryo period to ceramics, it may be wise to consider other cultural and technological contributions. Choi Sunu\textsuperscript{13} observes that the Koreans have, throughout history, spoken their own language. They invented their own alphabet. The oldest known wood printing in the world occurred during the eighth century in Korea. Moveable copper type was used 200 years before Gutenburg. Many books were published with moveable type before the fifteenth century.

Astronomy and calendar development were areas in which Koreans made significant contributions during the Koryo dynasty. Their work on the length of the year corresponds to the modern value to the sixth decimal place.

The pottery that evolved during the Koryo period was created with a Chinese influence, and under the direction of the Koryo dynasties. It did reflect, however, a character unique to the Koreans. In commenting on this character in works of art Sunu states,

\textsuperscript{13}Sunu, p. 60.
The next characteristic is the extensive use of light and quiet colour tones. The Korean people have shown an unmistakable preference for quiet and subdued colours as manifested by their paintings, ceramics, and clothes. One is pleasantly amazed by the harmony created by Korean paintings, ceramic wares, wood handicraft and a Korean man in traditional clothes. The traditional clothes of Korea are white, light bluish-green, soft pink, or indigo blue. The multicoloured festival garments of Korean children and the occasional crimson skirt and yellow jackets of youthful Korean women add but a weak accent to the quiet and subdued colouring of the Korean artistic milieu. This preference for light and subdued colouring may be best demonstrated by the ten centuries of Korean ceramic art. Five hundred years of Koryo celadons of clear and quiet hues were succeeded by five centuries of Yi white porcelains, of which blue and white pieces were most prized. Although embroidery and ox-horn chests were colourful, the important embroidered folding screens used primitive colours only with great restraint, modifying such colours to clear and quiet neutral tints. Often the various shades of blue were used as basic colour, and most landscapes were painted with light and subdued colours, perceived or unperceived. Folk paintings in clear and quiet colours were usually considered far better works. All these facts lead us to believe that art works using light and subdued colours harmonised with the Korean spirit.14

Honey comments on the characteristics of Korean pottery in terms of the character of the Korean people. He is not speaking of the Koryo dynasty alone, but of work throughout the centuries.

But the best Corean wares are not only original; they are the most gracious and unaffected pottery ever made. They have every virtue that pottery can have. Their shapes are simple, characteristically beautiful in proportion and outline, flowering easily and naturally into plastic and other decoration, incised or cared or inlaid, of unsurpassed beauty and strength. Painting when added seems to grow with perfect naturalness out of the form of the piece; it is simple, yet never obvious or facile, but tense and vital, as if were a symbol of the slow-burning fires of life itself. The pottery seems to speak at first of a serenely happy

14 Sunu, p. 66.
people, and only later, in a time of extreme poverty, does its graciousness give place to a wild austerity, which is no less admirable in a different way. This Corean pottery in fact reaches heights hardly attained even by the Chinese. It has at all times a great dignity, a quality which is said to accord with the character of the Corean people, as shown in the great periods of their history and even in their misery to-day.¹⁵

These analyses are apparent in Mei-ping vases of the Koryo period. The traditions are apparent and there is some agreement among writers on the interpretation of the symbols. The pale colors which are characteristic of Koryo celadons contrast vividly with the strong bold strokes of the continent. They do not reflect anything strong or positive but may be even considered negative. There may be a feeling for the life of a hermit. The Cultural Handbook of Korea says,

The people of Korea also eulogized man’s longevity and idealized this desire in the person of the sonin or hermit. In their imaginations, a hermit was a man who lived in the deep recesses of unapproachable mountains, subsisting on medicinal herbs believed to have the power to prevent aging. Hence the legend that Korea was an ancient land of hermits growing herbs for long life.¹⁶

The flying cranes which frequently appear on vases may have been chosen for their long legs, and necks, the narrow wings and the tall bodies. Interpretations may be made that the Koreans would see the cranes disappearing among the shreds of clouds leaving a few said cries behind them. Other popular themes were water-fowl among reeds

¹⁵Honey, p. 167.
and willow-trees. The loneliness that may be portrayed through this treatment would be appealing to the idea of coexistence with nature that was noted above. It is also in tune with the Buddhist philosophy of being in accord with nature. The form is believed to be consistent with the Korean nature as well. Koryo pottery is characterized by soft flowing curved lines. There is an absence of the straight lines that are more common to the Chinese pottery.

Gompertz disagrees with interpretations made by others that associate the curved lines with the hills, the hats, the hair, the shoes and even the prayers of Korea and states,

I should personally prefer to attribute it simply to the Korean love of long, slender lines and deliciously sensitive curves which is no more than a psychological trait and devoid of any deeper significance. We observe, then, in Korean ceramic wares of this time a unique linear sense which expresses itself in various ways but particularly in elongation and graceful curves.¹⁷

The Koryo wares may very well reflect a quietness of spirit that the uneducated potters possessed. If so, it was probably not an intentional representation, but rather, occurred because of the unaffected simple life led by the potters. Gompertz¹⁸ doubts that the craftsmen were so attuned to the spirit of the age that they could unconsciously reproduce it in their work. He questions if this interpretation may be one that is satisfying to the twentieth century observer rather than an actuality.

¹⁷Gompertz, p. 64.
¹⁸Ibid., p. 65.
The Koryo craftsman worked at the demand of the crown official kilns and responded to demands in the best way he could. His own best products may have been produced when demands of taste and standards were few.

Kato\textsuperscript{19} describes a present day Koryo kiln that is producing pottery in a manner believed to be similar to that produced during the Koryo dynasty. This writing may give insight into the activities of the Koryo potter although we cannot be sure the working conditions are the same. One major difference would be that these craftsmen are in private enterprise rather than bound to the throne. The potters may face somewhat the same creative restrictions since they are duplicating works of others, and are allowed little freedom for personal creativity.

In the rural town of Icheon, farmers lead cattle to market, women carry bundles on their heads as they may have several hundred years ago. They wear the traditional white robes, and green hats are common. Houses are white and green, also reflecting that the Korean love of these colors has probably not changed.

The work of the pottery is well organized with different processes carried out by different workers. The clay is kneaded by foot by a man who walks on it holding a rope for balance.

The wheels have heavy wooden heads, and are kicked with the left leg; no electricity is used at the pottery. The potters use no tools in throwing, and accomplish the throwing rapidly.

A fine tool is used to do the inlay work. It is done by hand, with no guides. A white slip is applied by a young boy in several coatings. The dried slip is then scraped off with a sharp metal triangular tool, until the incised pattern emerges.

The pots are bisque fired (A possible departure from the old ways), and are then dipped in celadon glaze.

The kiln is a forty-foot climbing kiln, built at a forty-five degree angle. Pine wood, cut by the potters and dried for a year, fires the kiln to 1150°C.

It is interesting to note that the owner of the kiln was sixty-five years old and had worked at his trade since he was sixteen. The workers varied in age, and much of the delicate incising work was done by teenagers. In ancient times, a profile of the Koryo period potter might be a poor man who lived in a village next to the kiln. Families may have worked together as units. Children of potters were probably required to become potters. The potter was uneducated, and little aware of the world outside of the village. The work was controlled throughout most of the dynasty. The pottery produced consistently high quality work. The work was unique to Korea and to the individual potter in spite of the controls under which the potter worked. At times throughout the dynasty there were lessening of controls because of governmental breakdowns. These were periods of greater individual creativeness.
Part II
Introduction to Part II

The thesis pots which I present to you are my attempt in trying to solve problems. I feel that these pots reflect myself; the nature of the maker and the physical nature of myself as a part of mankind. My hope is to show my relationship with regards to the natural environment, external or internal cultural influences. The investigation which was conducted in the first section of this paper, has given me a basis on which to look at my work as an art historian might. I also wish to reveal any thoughts about the making process, to help the observer understand my personal aesthetics.
Environment

Rochester Institute of Technology and Rochester as a whole, has a very supportive environment for the artist potter. Individual creative styles are encouraged and time is bought and paid for.

Technology as a part of the environment, makes working much more comfortable. Technology makes firing and glazes more predictable. Time is saved by using pre-packaged material. Developments such as electronics, high fire refractories, clay and glaze calculations, the modern potters wheel and clay mixing equipment, have dramatically changed the environment in which pottery is made.

I feel the problem with using technology to its potential, is that it separates me from what was our natural environment. That might be why I choose to wood fire.

There are choices one makes with regard to one's work and one's environment. In working with clay, one chooses to what degree accidents will be tolerated in the look of the final piece. A person choosing woodfiring, also chooses to work hard and to work with the forces of nature. The smells of the fire, with occasional breaths of fresh air, are part of the experience one has when choosing to use woodfirings. In doing my firings I choose to work with others who enjoy hard work and discussions of art and life. This choice of friends and these discussions became part of the working environment at R.I.T.

The potters from the Koryo dynasty had little choice in their lifestyle. It is a picture that is hard to imagine. The potters adapted to their limited environment and this is reflected in their work.
By studying Koryo dynasty pottery I found that potters are shaped by their culture. America's development, as explained by Rose Slivka, was unique in that it was "formed out of an idea rather than a geographic circumstance or racial motivations." The country was based on freedom of the individual. It became a melting pot of other cultures and "was a philosophic product of the Age of Reason and the economic spawn of the Industrial Revolution."  

The individual has become important in the making and the purchasing of today's pottery. Style is no longer dictated by an authoritarian ruling class.

Technology as a sub-area of our culture, played a key role in the development of the studio pottery tradition. It freed the potter from the manufacturing of utilitarian wares. There is still aesthetic and psychological need for handmade functional wares. The potter has had to re-evaluate his role.

Today's culture is transmitted through television, newspapers, radio, books, museums and daily living. The world, past or present, is at a researcher's fingertips. In what way should a pottery use it? The universities offer courses on the history of ceramics. Elain Levin explains that, "There is value to an art history approach because it

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21 Ibid.
allows us perspective to see where we've come from, how far we've come, and how much the past has to offer a contemporary expression in clay." She also says that "every art form needs a sense of its own history to give the medium its own vitality, an energy and direction, to allow it to make a significant contribution to American art." 

The oriental influence is seen as a significant event that bridged cultures and used history. The oriental influence according to Michael Cardew was, "the most significant event in the history of 20th century pottery. It was not a question of trying to imitate the forms of Chinese or Korean pots, it was a perception about the idea or attitude which lay behind them." Clark explains the initial contact,

The first with Oriental philosophy came through Bernard Leach. In 1940 this English potter wrote 'A Potter's Book', one of the classics of ceramic literature. In the opening chapter, Towards a Standard, Leach proposed a meeting of East and West that was later to define as 'Bauhaus over Sung.' This interest in the bridging of cultures had been a popular crusade among artists and intellectuals during the 1930's and 1940's, and Leach had been part of one of the more influential groups that had gathered at Dartington Hall in Devon and included Mark Tobey, Ravi Shankar, Aldous Huxley, and Pearl Buck.

Michael Cardew mentions the difference between, "Industrial Man" and the Chinese. "He has thought of Nature chiefly as something to be

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23 Ibid.


controlled and overcome, its forces harnessed, an enemy to be reduced to servitude; whereas the Chinese, who evolved porcelain, treated her more like a mother to be honored or a mistress to be courted, and somehow persuaded to comply with their desires,"26 and goes on to explain the oriental influence on western potters.

"We do not want to make Chinese, or Korean, or primitive pots. But we have seen clearly what they have which our own so badly lack, and having seen it we are not likely to lose sight of it again."27

Rhodes, a contemporary American, also mentions the influence from the East.

The drip and poured glaze application was a natural and easy process. It went quickly, involved no great skill or precision. Until recently in Western art, such processes, involving a considerable element of the accidental, were ignored or scorned as lacking depth, meaning, or design. Only in the mid-twentieth century have we come to realize that process and result can be as one, that the artist may identify with his work physically and kinetically, as well as intellectually, and that a relaxed and immediate enactment in painting, in calligraphy, in poetry, in dance, and even in music and theater can open the door to possibilities lying somewhere between the creator and his media, possibilities that can be reached for only with means other than the mind. Certain old Japanese pots powerfully and unforgettably demonstrate the potential of the direct and nonconscious union of action and materials.28

26Cardew, p. 24.
Today, the oriental influence on pottery is not as strong as it once was but the idea of using history is very important. Garth Clark mentions a strong group of potters and explains their way of working.

They explore the limitations of the form through careful development and refinement of a limited and evolving range of forms and surfaces. Their central dynamic is volume, the enclosure of space around which all other input revolves. The term traditional is a difficult one, for it has acquired overtones of romantic anachronism. The potters, although fully respecting their past and the elemental qualities of pottery, are nonetheless contemporary artists.29

Painting is an influence on today's pottery. Rose Slivka explains:

Pottery, of course, has always served as a vehicle for painting, so this in itself is nothing new. The painted pottery of Greece strictly followed the precepts of the painting of the time in style and quality, while that of Japan was often freer and in advance of its other media of painting, even anticipating abstract modern approaches. Contemporary painting, however, has expanded the vocabulary of abstract decoration and given fresh meaning to the accidental effects of dipped, dripped, poured, and brushed glazes and slips on the pot in the round.30

Music may also be an influence on contemporary potters. Garth Clark describes a jazzman and his manner of creation. "Always seeking to break through expected patterns, the jazzman makes it while he is playing it. With superb mastery of his instrument and intimate identification with it, the instrumentalist creates at the same time he performs."31

29 Clark, A Century of Ceramics, p. 204.
30 Slivka, p. 139.
31 Ibid., p. 141.
There are many cultural influences that effect the final work. Today's culture is something quite different from that of the Koryo dynasty. Communication, technology, research, and the study of the past have changed the world cultures significantly. The individual is of greater importance.

My Work as an Individual Potter

Unlike the Koryo potter, I am relatively free to work in any direction or style without restrictions imposed by the state or by others. The limitations of working with ceramic material is one that is self imposed. This freedom of choice has evolved out of our modern culture. This freedom to work the way I do stimulates my intellect and feeds my emotion.

My satisfaction in making a work of art proceeds through various stages that shall be described in the succeeding pages. These processes are ones I have labeled, as: series, preparation, form, surface to form relationships, and wood firing.

The quote by Barnard Leach expresses some of my feelings about working in clay. "Under the potter's hands the clay responds to emotion and thought from a long past, to his own intuition of the lovely and the true..." 32

Series

A series may be defined as a number of similar or related things that come one after another. It describes a satisfactory way for me to work in producing large round stoneware containers. The advantage of working in series is that the basic techniques, once learned, may be applied to all pieces to produce gradual improvement in the work. Each piece builds on the subtleties, form, and surface of the preceding piece, allowing the artist to quickly improve the work. Hands move where they are told almost instinctively, or out of habit. Practice is similar to a musical performer who modifies a basic theme until it is perfected. A significant gain in confidence is experienced as the pieces evolve, and the artist becomes more relaxed as the pieces evolve.

Preparation

Preparation is of importance because it prepares the potter for what follows. It is an invisible act with regards to what the final work looks like. It is the beginning to the "making" process. I enjoy the physical workout of wedging and the pounding of the ball of clay. It is an act similar to one experienced by an athlete preparing for a contest. It stretches muscles, loosens up the body and quickens the heart.

When I work on a series of large vases I prepare two, eight to nine pound balls of clay for each piece. I throw and pound down the first ball of clay to the wheel head. The other ball is then slapped on
top and pounded into shape. The pounding activity is very rhythmic, having a definite beat. This rhythmic, automatic activity is enjoyable to me. It is also a physical release, clearing and focusing the mind for feelings about the forming process that is to begin. It sets the tone for the way the clay is handled throughout the life of the pot. If one's mind is not completely focused, the life of the pot could be very short. Strong concentrations generally brings more satisfactory results.

I have confidence in my strength and feel comfortable preparing to throw large amounts of clay. Although most satisfaction is related to the finished pot the physical challenge of handling the clay is a rewarding experience.

Form and Forming

I feel I would rather be throwing than anything else. I know and to some extent understand this world of the wheel. It is private and very personal. The workout and the challenge of throwing large pots is almost an athletic activity. The large pots are about as big as I can make them by centering one lump of clay. I enjoy looking at pots and trying to read through them to the nature of the maker.

Throwing on the wheel is very systematic activity. In order to carry it out and have a successful object as a result requires focus. The throwing process starts out with centering and opening, then a series of pulls to raise what is called a cylinder. The shaping of the pot occurs on the last few pulls to raise a cylinder. A refined pot needs a more complex shaping process. The left hand shapes the
inside and the right controls the outside shape by the application of pressure. The left and the right hand have to be in direct relationship; where one controls the centrifugal forces, and the other the centripetal forces through a smooth transition. The process itself takes a solid mass of clay and turns it into a hollow form. The process is complex and is not easily understood unless one has seen it. The pot is a reflection of the thought that goes on during the physical act of making. How far one should take the clay, and sensing when to push and not to push, or pushing farther than one should, are judgements that must be made. The finished pot is a documentation of the throwing process and it may bring a sense of achievement to the potter.

My thoughts and feelings are my own about learning through discovery and observation. Wayne Higby describes his first year of graduate school, and his words describe my own feelings.

At the end of my first year in graduate school in '68, I came up with a form, kind of around jar form, egg-shaped. The storage jar was to me 'the form'; I described it as the symbolic pot. That was my concept of The Pot. It was a summation involving a classic resolution, with a lot of tension and lot of expansion and lot of volume and surface. I was interested in pottery but only from a historical point of view—pots to make you think about pottery. Somehow you were working out ideas that were connected to history, so that the pot was an idea more than it was something to use. I was paying homage. \(^{33}\)

I am an abstractionist, and I deal with line, form and composition. Idea of lift, thrust, neck size in relationship to body, and form in

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relationship to surface, are matters of concern. In some pots I hope to achieve a sense of grace. Sketches of desired forms are created on paper and those ideas are shaped in clay. Surface designs are sketched on paper as well as on the pot itself.

I like the way the shoulder of the round forms catch the ash in the wood firing process. The largeness of size gives a feeling of monumentality among other thrown forms.

Surface and Surface to Form Relationships

The piece is thrown, shaped and set aside to dry. At a little before the leather hard stage, the pots are bagged in plastic. When a series of pots accumulate, a choice is made of which ones will be painted with white slip, and left to dry more slowly. The reason for dividing the pots into groups is that I enjoy working with both surfaces. White slip is a greater challenge creating a more varied surface. Most of my pots have been coated with slip. These pots were placed on a banding wheel from which an application of slip was applied by hand or brush. The viscosity of the material tended to vary and influenced the final results.

Drawing on a slipped pot is drawing three-dimensionally. My subject matter, like the form it'self, is abstract, dealing with the forces of the wheel and its relationship to me and my body. I also work with the formal elements of design and their relationship to the pot. Elements such as line, form, texture, composition, balance, and color may enhance or destroy the form.
The objects used to make the marks contain characteristics of their own that is apparent in the white slip. Hands, brushes, and a variety of other devices have been used. In some cases a variety of tools were used together, one playing off the other and overlapping as they moved on the surface.

Rhythm sometimes developed out of the motion of the wheel, as time and gravity effected the objects used to make the mark. In some cases, an internal beat was developed, in others an external beat, such as music, affected the surface.

Line was used and read as many different things. The state of my mind changed with mood, and this may be apparent on the surface. Anger may be revealed through lines of aggression. Graceful lines may read as a calm state. I did not attack pots but tried to let myself be revealed through them.

The touch of the hand to the pot and the way the slip slides through the hand or brush certainly effects the way the surface reads.

There are apparent human relationships to the size of the pot and to the shape of the pot. The pot is human scale and has a presence that is felt. The shape of one of my typical pots can best be described as having a swollen belly, narrow foot, a constricting neck and a lip. Each term reflects the association of past potters. Sometimes the pot is me, sometimes another person as I apply the slip.

Certainly one pot does not have all of these things in it, and all the pots made contain much more than described here. The personal interpretation is the key to the feelings and structure found in these marks. The type of pottery that deals with feeling is common in other
cultures, some arising perhaps by tradition, with some other showing the independence of the artist.

The glazing of the piece is influenced by many factors. Experimentation has played a key role in decisions made, and test results account for source material. Tea bowls are used for tests, but other things have been substituted including the large pots. New things must be tried as one seeks to learn.

Color and glazes are somewhat limited by what is manageable in a cone 10 woodfiring. In my woodfirings, earth colors dominated. Favorite recipes included matte, as well as shiny glazes. Mattes were used for their non-reflective nature. Both types were often used on the same piece.

Some pots suggest a desire to be touched, others are rough as a result of the woodfiring. Some surfaces are a strange combination. One surface gives the feeling one should pick at it. With wood as a fuel, refiring was common, and sometimes improved the original condition. Occasionally roughness was given by nature with pleasing results.

Celadon glazes tend to pool in slipped areas and created an illusionary depth. Other glazes, such as the crackle glaze, worked about the same way. Some clear glazes formed crystals which sometimes unexpectedly appeared on certain areas of the pot. Crystals can also give feelings of depth through illusion.

I have tried some experiments with interior and exterior relationships. The outside of a successful pot was glazed a dark matte green
and the interior which was revealed on the lip was white and shiny. The interior of the pot invited one in.

Some pots were salt glazed. Salt changes the character of the glaze, as well as the exposed surface of the pot. I was interested in working with matte glazes in conjunction with the shiny salt surface, and exploring the possibilities of salt firing with wood.

Pots that were coated with white slip were sometimes left unglazed and unsalted. The fly ash from the woodfiring and the ash that sifted on the shoulder caused a natural glaze in the area of the pot touched by the long flame. The marks on the surface carried the ash from the shoulder.

The loading of the kiln was very important to produce evenly fired work, and also to mark the surface in an interesting way. Color of the clay showed through in the thin slipped areas to contrast with the whiteness of the heavier areas. All of the pots shown were wood fired, and some were a combination of wood and salt.

Woodfiring

Woodfiring is one of the processes or stages in the creation of my pottery that brings satisfaction. Notes taken at a winter 1982 firing indicate observations and feeling involved with this activity.

Woodfiring January 15, 1982

The wood smells so good, almost sweet. The heat from the kiln makes firing real cozy after a snow fall last night. We (Lee Rexrode
and Ed Corle) about froze last night, loading. It seemed like forever getting ready for this thing. Chopping wood last fall was sure smart. I like to throw pots and slip them but I sure hate to glaze and load. I like to watch the flames dance before my eyes. Sparks fly with the sound of a crack. Stoking the fire now through a port. Be careful not to overstoke. You have to keep the flame at the proper level at this time in the firing. This is the best part of the firing, later things will get real hectic. The sawdust is a mess. Thousands of tiny explosions.

This is a new kiln and we are not sure how to fire it. There were many interested onlookers, but still it seemed like a very personal experience because we had helped build the kiln. Lee and I had fired the old kiln about ten different times and had worked through problems we had encountered. The wood and the system for handling wood is all worked out now. We had to learn how to search for things. They throw away a lot of potential fuel here at R.I.T.

We built the kiln last summer. Bob Schmitz was the brains of the operation. The work was hard, but it was fun and we learned a lot. It seems like a good kiln. I think it will fire beautifully, if we learn its secrets. I also think we need to reduce the thing, and stoke slower when firing off the back. The last firing seemed a disaster, there was sand in our ash (Now I think it was a success as two of my favorite pots came from that firing). Other kinds of firings are much safer. Gas and electric seem very precise and easy, but there is something romantic about woodfiring. I feel this is a part of my work. The spirit to make something difficult for the pure joy.
I went to get more wood and brought in four pallet ends, they burn best at this stage of the firing. They are made of oak that is 2"x4"x4' in length. It sure was cold out there; it sent a chill down my spine. It is warm close to the kiln. The snow is sliding off the roof, and it seems like it is going to be a nice day. Clear days carry the smoke off better, and I believe, make a better firing. At one point last week we were looking for a blizzard. We moved it to today and it is beautiful for a winter day. I have trouble smelling the smoke, I guess I have been in here too long.

Kodak pallets are the best but you practically have to steal to get one. I have heard that they are expensive. Their oak lengths fit right in the fire box; no splitting or chopping. The pine slats are split small and used at the end of the firing. They tend to crackle when you throw them in.

I am going to have to quicken my pace as far as stoking. I have been at this speed for some time now. The coals are building up real nice. The trick is not to blow up your cone packs, crack the shelves, or your pots.

I have to gauge when to stoke by the height of the flame. The feeding starts to become automatic. Later, we will stoke very quickly, up to a handful of thin pieces every few seconds. This is a welcome break from the daily routine of the shop.

Decisions in making pottery today are a matter of personal responsibility rather than cultural imposition. The explanation of the process of making was revealed in hopes to bring insight and justification to the visible or physical marks made.
The process of making is broken down into a number of stages which may or may not be clearly revealed in the finished piece. In most pots there is evidence of the physical act of making. Some pots reveal an overlapping of processes. The process contributes significantly to the way the piece looks. Decisions are guided by the process which provides a structure within which to create.

Series is a satisfactory way for me to work. I build on the knowledge gained from the work completed, and feel relaxed and gaining confidence as I work towards improvement.

I enjoy the physical and mental focusing activity of the preparation process. Satisfactory results are usually obtained through strong concentration.

There is a challenge in the forming of the piece. The physical act itself is very systematic. The mental challenge is to express something of a maker with the background of traditional ceramics.

The marks on the surface are a reaction and interpretation of my relationship to the pot form. Color and glaze are used to further enhance these ideas.
Conclusion
There are two parts to this thesis experience; the actual making of the piece and the dissertation. The parts together are evidence of knowledge and individual research in a subject which I chose. The media which I feel most comfortable with is clay. Expressing myself verbally is something which must be done in order to fulfill a requirement for an academic degree, and not something I particularly enjoy.

I have, however, found the paper to be an educational experience. It showed me how to observe influences on pottery historically, culturally, environmentally and the way the work processes reflect the attitudes of the individual. The historical research showed me how to analyze works by potters. The paper has allowed me to feel separated from the work just completed and to set about examination of it with a different perspective. Many of the ideas which I have stumbled upon will continue to be investigated throughout a lifetime of work.

I would like to view more historical examples of pottery. Much of the work in the first section was done by viewing photographs in books. I did, however, have some first hand knowledge of the work but I would like to have an opportunity to touch and handle works of pottery.

The investigation into form and surface possibilities was also viewed as only a beginning. I now have a basis on which to continue work.

The world has changed drastically since the Koryo dynasty potters produced their wares. While there are some who make a business of trying to reproduce Koryo pottery in Korea today, it is not expected that they will be totally successful. Did I try to reproduce the Koryo
pottery? Not in the sense of imitating it. My work has been influenced by it, as I tried to incorporate elements of form into my pots.

A potter today should reflect, a sincerely as possible, his own time on earth in his work. As the Koryo pots reflected the leading cultures of that age and subdued the influence of any single potter, so do the pots being made today reflect the culture in which we live. While I, as an artist, pride myself on individual efforts, I must recognize that culture influenced me, as it has all patterns of the past. It is likely that as future historians view art works from this age, it will be in terms of movements and trends, rather than individual expression.

Even in the days of the rigid Koryo pottery individuals deviated from the expected process and gradually created new art forms. Without that rigidity, a potter today can be much more free to create his own work. That freedom is not without the restraint of culture, if the work is to be accepted.
Bibliography
Bibliography


Appendix

Plates